Maulvi Mohammad Baqar and Dehli Urdu Akhbaar

Dr. Aijaz Ahmad
Associate Professor in History
YMD College, Nuh
Haryana-122107
Mobile: 9034903618
Mail: aijazahmadnuh@gmail.com

The newspaper *Dehli Urdu Akhbar*, historically started in 1837 published on every Saturday by Maulvi Mohammad Akbar, the father of Maulvi Mohammad Baqar with the name of *Dehli Akhbar*, which later changed its name as *Dehli Urdu Akhbar* in 1840. Maulvi Mohammad Baqar, the father of the Urdu poet and critic Mohammad Husain Azad, a Shia theologian of Delhi, a pioneer and outspoken journalist, was the editor of '*Dehli Urdu Akhbar*'. On 12th July 1857, its name again changed as *Akhbar-uz-Zafar* and started to be published on Sunday in defiance of the Christian decree that opposed the idea of a newspaper being issued on Sunday.[1]

He echoed this vision in slightly different and more explicitly Islamic language. Through this newspaper, he took active part in the uprising of 1857. He called to the people to rise against the foreign rule and also published a pamphlet '*Risala-i-Jihad*' in which he called for a Holy War against the British and drive them out from India. After the fall of Delhi in September 1857, he was arrested on 15th September 1857 and shortly executed by Major Hodson without any proper trial.[2]

At the outbreak of the uprising, in May 1857 he wrote in his columns how the rebellion had been sent by God to punish the *Kafirs* for their arrogant plan to wipe out the religions of India. For him, the speed and thoroughness of the reverses suffered by the British was proof of miraculous divine intervention.

Through the writings in his *Dehli Urdu Akhbar*, he always encouraged the revolutionaries of the uprising. Apart from the encouragement, Maulvi Mohammad Baqar applauded the revolutionaries to bolster mutual solidarity and follow the instructions of central commanding forces during the war. He endeavored to infuse loyalty to the Emperor there by invoking centripetal tendencies and joint action. He boosted the morale of the revolutionaries by calling

them *Sipah-i-Hindostan* (the army of India) and appealed to 'fellow countrymen' (*ahli watan*) to rally in a united way against the British.

In 1857, this newspaper gained much popularity under the editorship of Maulvi Mohammad Baqar, which was printed and published by Sayyed Abdullah, the Manager of *Dehli Urdu Akhbar* Press. This newspaper gives the eye witness account of Delhi and neighbourhood rebel regime. Maulvi Baqar gave more stress on the authenticity and asked the correspondents not to rely on hearsay and rumours. It frequently called the Tilanga to the rebel Sepoys and Angrez to the British.[3]

In its issue of 10th May, the newspaper gives the detailed account of Meerut and Lucknow and discontent among the Sepoys. On the basis of a report of 8th May, this newspaper writes that "there is a riot in Meerut city and there is no night spent when the rioters not have burnt the bungalows of British officers. There is also a burning fire in the hearts of the Sepoys due to the use of new greased cartridges." In the same issue on the basis of Lucknow reporting of 4th May, the newspaper writes that in addition to the greased cartridge issue, there is also a rumour that the British Government provides flours mixed with grounded bone.[4]

In its issue of 17th May, the newspaper writes its entire first page with the gallantry of the Sepoys and does not show even a little sympathy for the Europeans who were killed by the Sepoys. This issue creates a history by setting the first example of the spot reporting. Maulvi Baqar says, "The present scribe too came out of his house to see things for himself, inspired as he was by a regard to the glory of his faith and hearing the sounds of gunfire. I was confronted by the strange sight that the people were running from Kashmiri Gate side into the market. Personal safety was no doubt in danger but dearer to me than my personal safety was the desire to see unusual sights and the other equally strong desire to give a faithful eye witnessed accounts of events to my readers. As I moved forward, I heard gunshots near the bungalow of Sikander Sahab. A little ahead I saw that Sahab Bahadur was running for his life, sword in hand and followed by the Tilangis with their guns close at the heel. In the rear was a crowed of common people, some with sticks in their hands, other with bamboos, chasing the beleaguered Englishmen at the hot speed. They hunted down from Zeenat Bara towards the canal. I moved towards Naseerganj."[5]

The newspaper of this issue also writes that some Tilangis killed the Europeans who were hided in the Fakhrul Masajid. Maulvi Baqar further reports, "I saw that two hundred or three hundred cavaliers and Tilangis are standing at a place and spread in the groups and asks the each and every people that where are the Englishmen? .....and seen that two or three Englishmen were laid dead in every lane. They killed every Englishman with his family by hunting from their bungalows (*Kothis*)." The reporter also expresses pleasure on the killing of Nixon, head of the Chancellery and Taylor, the Principal of the Delhi College. It also reports that most of the Englishmen were killed, and some fled towards Ambala, but they were attacked in Panipat and Karnal, and only three survivors could reach the destiny.[6]

In the issue of 24th May, the newspaper published a poem of Mohammad Hussain Azad under the title of *A History of Instructive Reversals* تاریخ انقلاب عبرت افزا that vividly reflected the popular sentiments aroused by the first war of independence. The poem recalls, "the great rulers and conquerors like Soloman and Alaxander, cruel tyrants like Hajjaj, Changez, Halaku and Nadir, great epic heroes and sages have all disappeared... Yesterday the Christians were in the ascendant; world-seizing, world-bestowing; the possessors of skill and wisdom; the possessors of splendour and glory; the possessors of a mighty army. But what use was that; against the sword of the Lord of Fury? All their wisdom could not save them; their schemes became useless; their knowledge and science availed them nothing; the Tilangas of the East have killed them all. O Azad, learn this lesson: For all their wisdom and vision; the Christian rulers have been erased; without leaving a trace in this world."[7]

This newspaper of the same issue expresses grief over the robbery and loot by the anti-social elements of Delhi and outsiders. In these days, most of the victims were wealthy and honorable persons of the society. Even the royal official's and prince's involvement was also noticed. It was moreover reported that lower caste people in the uniform of Tilangis generally looting the public and British houses. Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar warned the peoples, Tilangis and other officials that if they did not stop loot and plunder, then he would leave for Mecca. After his warning normalcy restored to many extent.[8]

In the issue of 31st May, the newspaper reports that many Muslim clerics aroused the religious sentiments of the people. Maulvi Baqar quotes the words of a cleric, "O Muslims, congratulations; the Islamic progress is compulsory on you. Stay on your faith and believe in the

trueness of divinity and honour of Almighty and don't be misguided to believe in the knowledge skill, wisdom, and character of the Christians..." This newspaper also reports that the Tilangis became so rich by looting the havelis of Englishmen. They went to the mahajans to convert their rupees into gold coins (*asharfis*). They purchased the *asharfis* in 20-25 rupees while the current rate was 16-17 rupees. Many Tilangis were befooled many times by the fake mahajans. This newspaper also showed its unhappiness over the killing of a Kshatri horseman and injuring a vegetable vendor in Chandni Chauk.[9]

The issue of 14th June of this newspaper basically preaches the Hindus and Muslims to remain firm to their respective religions and be inspired by its laws and personalities and also remain united against their common enemy the Europeans. To the common enemy the Europeans, whom Maulvi Mohammad Baqar compared to Ravana, the demon king, in the Hindu epic the *Ramayana*. Maulvi Mohammad Baqar appeals the Hindus and Muslims that God is great and except Him everything would perish in this world. All were appealed to unite, if Muslims, take the name of the God and Prophet and follow the Holy Quraan and Hadith, if Hindus, pray *Parmeshwar* and *Narayan* and see their books of *Dharam Katha* and through their religious personalities pray for favour and end the hardships. The Sepoys are to follow the examples of Bhim, Arjun, Rustam, Changez, Halaku, Taimur and Nadir Shah to defeat the English. It also appealed that the English being Christians and so believing in the Trinity of God are now held to polytheist and infidels while Hindus being believers in *Adipurush* share the basic belief of one God with Muslims and so are close to them. So both Hindus and Muslims were therefore called upon to fight against the British.[10]

In the same issue he urged the Muslims to see through the light of the Quraan, and the Hadith and Hindus in the light of their own wisdom, Gyan, and dharma, (faith) to see that except God Almighty, nothing is permanent. Baqar made exemplary efforts to quote examples of great figures from history and mythology, epics and legends in order to inspire the Hindus and the Muslims solidarity during the war.[11]

In the same issue of 14th June, the editor continues writing on the same subject, "O my countrymen, looking at the strategy and devious cleverness of the English, their ability to make arrangements and to order the world in the way they wish, the wide expanses of their dominions and their overflowing treasuries and revenues, you may feel disheartened that such a people

could ever be overcome. But my Hindu brothers, if you look in your Holy books you will see how many magnificent dynasties have come into being in the land of Hindustan, and how they all met their end. Even Ravana and his army of demons were beaten by Raja Ramchandra (the Hindu God King Ram)... Except the *Adipurush*, the primeval Deity, nothing is permanent... If God brings all these magnificent kingdoms to an end after a short period, why do you not comprehend that God has sent his hidden help (to defeat) this hundred year old kingdom (of the British) so that this community (the Christians) who regarded the children of God with contempt, and addressed your brothers and sisters as 'black men,' have now been insulted and humiliated? Realise this, and you will lose your fear and apprehension. To run away and turn your back now would be akin to denying divine help and favour..."[12]

The newspaper of 21st June, by feeling the anxiety of the people it encourages them to not to be afraid of Englishmen's strength and gunfire and recalls that only those dies whose time elapsed. It tries to remove the phobic reactions due to heavy arms and armament of the British forces while recalling that how the Angels helped the Muslims in Battle of Badar. It says that the English rulers are not only of a different religion but also of a different race and speaking a different language. They did not spend the wealth to this country of Hindustan and deprive this country from its own wealth. The newspaper also informs that some of the pro- British natives were supplying the ration to the British camps. The Tilangas had caught intelligently some of them who were carrying the ration, to the British, tied like the corpse on the cot.[13]

In the issue of 5th July, it has been said that the British tried to create the rift among Indian on religious grounds by pasting a copy of the *Ishtihar* (Public Notice) on the Jama Masjid which described the rebellion as the handiwork of some unfaithful servants of the East India Company who not only imprisoned women and children but also captured the Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar. The Notice called upon Muslims to wage a 'holy war against Hindus', for the Christians were the natural allies of Muslims as 'People of the Book' according to the *Shariat* (Muslim Law). It asserted that the use of pig-tallow in the greased cartridges was a totally false rumour. The editor Maulvi Baqar gave a point by point rebuttal and declared this notice as a conspiracy, the handiwork of enemies of both '*Dharm*' and '*Iman*' (the faith of Hindus and Muslims). He said sarcastically that the English could not try to deceive anyone by invoking the *Shariat* and urged, "Now brother countrymen and especially those who serve the army, let us beware of these

attempts to divide us. We are united as part of the body. Let us sacrifice all our comforts in the task of liberating ourselves from fears.[14]

The *Dehli Urdu Akhbar* issue of 12th July changed its name as *Akhbar-uz-Zafar*, the title suggested by Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar. In this issue, the editor informs that the so-called mighty Englishmen are being escaped to the safest places in the Indian ladies' dress and also perform bowing salute to the strangers. It also says that there is a continuous flow of the forces combined with the *Jihadis*. Maulvi Baqar instigated the Indians that how in the Battle of Khandak, the unarmed Muslims were supported by the Angels of Almighty God and finally, the infidels fled with much loss.[15]

In the issue of 19th July, Maulvi Baqar urges the Hindus and Muslims to unite and consider each other's body organs as their own and fight against the Englishmen. He recalls the Almighty's help that how the five cavalrymen in green dress were fighting before the Tilangis and later on became invisible. The newspaper also gives the details of court proceedings of Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar and his instructions to punish the Tilangis who kills the innocents.[16]

Maulvi Mohammad Baqar quotes a dream of a person, in his newspaper on 24th July, as "Our Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), said to Jesus that your followers have become an enemy of my name and wish to efface my religion. To this Lord Jesus replied that the British are not my followers, they do not follow my path, they have joined ranks with Satan's followers... Some people even swear that the day the troopers came here, there were camels (*Sandnis*-female bull) ahead of them on which rode green-robed riders... These green riders instantly vanished from sight and only the troopers remained, killing whichever Englishman they found, cutting them up as if they were carrots or radishes... Truly the English have been afflicted with divine wrath by the true avenger. Their arrogance has brought them divine retribution for, as the Holy Quraan says, God does not love the arrogant ones."[17]

The newspaper of 9th August says that the royal forces were in doubt that wazir Hakim Ahsanullah was in alliance with the British and finally arrested him and also looted and burnt his house. It is said that the gunpowder factory which was blown, and many hundred men were slain was due to his conspiracy. However, it is also said that the factory was blown due to the pebble in the grind stone.[18]

In the issues of 16th August, 23rd August and 13th September, the newspaper generally discourages the pro-British feelings, loose of faith by Indians and their hope of reoccupation of the British. The newspaper also informs that at many places where British have set their administration started killing of innocent population, particularly the Muslims. Nevertheless, Maulvi Baqar encourages the *Jihadi* and other martial men to believe in Almighty as most of the Englishmen were killed and routed with the Devine help.[19]

Almost all times from the beginning of the uprising to the re-occupation of the British over Delhi, the newspaper *Delhi Urdu Akhbar* continuously encouraged the revolutionaries to fight the accursed Europeans by maintaining Hindu-Muslim unity. After re-occupation of Delhi by the British, its editor Maulvi Baqar was brutally shot dead by Major Hodson.

References:

1. This information was based on the report of Mohammad Hussain Azad, the son of Maulvi Mohammad Baqar. It also notable that Maulvi Baqar's name was not attached to this newspaper until 1850s. (*The Annual of Urdu Studies*, Vol. 18, 2003, Madison, USA, pp. 119-120 & pp. 17-18).
2. Samiuddin, Abida, *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Urdu Literature*, (Vol. I), New Delhi, 2007, p. 106.
3. *People's Democracy*, (*Rebel Journalism: Dehli Urdu Akhbar, May-September 1857*- Shireen Moosvi), Vol.XXXI, No. 17, April, 29, 2007.
4. *Dehli Urdu Akhbar*, 10th May, 1857.
5. *Ibid*, 17th May, 1857.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid*, 24th May, 1857.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid*, 31st May, 1857, (Munshi Jeevan Lal in his Roznamacha also narrates the same story; "the mutineers had possessed themselves of much money and were buying gold mohurs at 32 rupees apiece. ..... The demand for gold increasing, many of the soldiers were duped by the city Budmashes, who, leading them to one of the Mohallas, invited them to

sit down while they brought them the coveted gold mohurs. Then taking the money to buy the gold, they decamped by another way and left the soldiers to deplore their loss. The soldiers revenged themselves upon the innocent people of the Mohalla. Metcalfe, Charles Theophilus, *Two Native Narratives of the Mutiny in Delhi,* (Eng. trans. of *Roznamcha Mainudin Hasan Khan* and *Munshi Jeewan Lal*) , London, 1898, pp. 100-101

10. *Dehli Urdu Akhbar,* 14th June, 1857.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid,* 21st June, 1857.
14. *Ibid,* 5th July, 1857.
15. *Ibid,* 12th July, 1857.
16. *Ibid,* 19th July, 1857.
17. *Ibid*, 24th July, 1857.
18. *Ibid,* 9th August, 1857.
19. *Ibid,* 16th August, 23rd August and 13th September, 1857.